

E Pluribus Unum, or the Same Old Perfume in a New Bottle?

On the Future of Racial Stratification in the United States

What Does All the Racial Noise Mean? A Sketch of Things to Come

LATINOS ARE NOW OFFICIALLY the largest minority group in the nation. According to the Census Bureau, while blacks comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population, Latinos are 16.3 percent.¹ This Latino population explosion, generated by immigration, has already created a number of visible fractures in the United States that seem to be shifting the racial terrain. In academic circles, for instance, conservative scholars have begun attacking the new racial demography as devastating for the future of the country. An example of these scholars is Harvard's political scientist Samuel Huntington, who in his recent book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, argued that Latino immigration threatens Anglo-Saxon American culture as well as the political integrity of the country.² And politicians in both parties as well as prominent newscasters such as Lou Dobbs—since 2003 or so, he has addressed every night the topic of illegal immigration in his show *Lou Dobbs Tonight* in his nightly segment “Broken Borders”³ and almost all *Fox News* commentators (e.g., Brit Hume, Tony Snow, Sean Hannity, John Gibson, and Fox's most vitriolic newscaster, Bill O'Reilly) articulate and inflame the anti-immigrant fears for the wider public.

In addition to the Latino population explosion, other trends have emerged that challenge our traditional biracial divide (white vs. nonwhite) and, more specifically, our black-white understanding of racial politics in the United States. For example, another group that has gained visibility in our racial discussions is Asian Americans, partly because of their demographic gains

(they are now 5 percent of the population), partly because as a group, they are perceived as doing very well economically and educationally, and, more importantly, partly because they are still viewed by most Americans through the lenses of developments in South East Asia.⁴ On this last point, the commercial rise of Japan and, particularly, of China, has generated a fear of the East that can be seen in movies (e.g., *Red Corner* [1997], *Mulan* [1998], etc.), political scandals, and in the way China is discussed almost every night in the news.⁵

Yet another illustration of the changing racial terrain in the United States is our recent national discussion on the status of “multiracial” and “biracial” people.⁶ Two events shaped our collective engagement on these matters over the last ten years. First, phenom golfer Tiger Woods, son of a black father and a Tai mother, made a public statement suggesting he was not black but rather “Cablanasian” (a mixture of Caucasian, black, and Asian). This led to a furious public debate on what it means to be “black” or “mixed” and whether or not people could claim a racial identity other than those already inscribed in our racial pentagram. (Who had ever heard of such a thing as a Cablanasian?) Second, the struggle by people in the multiracial movement⁷ to force changes in the way the Census Bureau gathered racial data—specifically, to include a multiracial category, which coincided with efforts by Republican politicians to end the collection of racial data altogether—ended with the addition of the “More than one race” item in the 2000 Census schedule.

Finally, and related to some of the developments mentioned above, the rate of interracial dating and marriage between Latinos and whites and Asians and whites has skyrocketed.⁸ In general, interracial marriage, which accounted for less than 1 percent of all marriages in the country, accounts today for 5.4 percent. Many demographers and a few public intellectuals have heralded this development as signifying the erosion of racial boundaries and maybe pointing the way out of our national racial quagmire.⁹

Thus, as I write this revised edition, we all ponder about what will be the future of race in America. How will the Latino population explosion affect the three-hundred-year-old racial drama of the country? Will Latinos replace blacks as the racial boogeyman¹⁰ or will they become white, as some analysts have suggested?¹¹ And how will Asians fit in the emerging racial totem pole? Will they be treated as white or vilified as the enemies within, as happened to Japanese Americans during World War II? Or do all these trends signify that I have wasted my time (and your money) writing this book because, as some public commentators have argued, we live in the time of “the end of racism” or, at least, of “the declining significance of race”?¹²

These are the kinds of issues that prompted me to write this chapter. My basic claim, unlike the romantic predictions of assimilationists¹³ or the racialized pessimism of Anglo-Saxonists such as Huntington, is that all this

reshuffling denotes that the biracial order typical of the United States, which was the exception in the world racial system,¹⁴ is evolving into a complex and loosely organized triracial stratification system similar to that of many Latin American and Caribbean nations. Specifically, I contend that the emerging triracial system will be comprised of “whites” at the top, an intermediary group of “honorary whites”—similar to the coloreds in South Africa during formal apartheid—and a nonwhite group or the “collective black” at the bottom. I sketch in figure 9.1 what these three groups may look like. I hypothesize that the white group will include “traditional” whites, new “white” immigrants and, in the near future, totally assimilated white Latinos (e.g., former secretary of education Lauro Cabazos, the football coach of the University of Wisconsin Barry Alvarez, and actors such as Martin Sheen), lighter-skinned multiracials, and other subgroups; the intermediate racial group or honorary whites will comprise most light-skinned Latinos (e.g., most Cubans and segments of the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities), Japanese Americans, Korean

FIGURE 9.1
Preliminary Map of Triracial Order in the USA

“Whites”

- Whites
- New whites (Russians, Albanians, etc.)
- Assimilated white Latinos
- Some multiracials
- Assimilated (urban) Native Americans
- A few Asian-origin people

“Honorary Whites”

- Light-skinned Latinos
- Japanese Americans
- Korean Americans
- Asian Indians
- Chinese Americans
- Middle Eastern Americans
- Most multiracials

“Collective Black”

- Vietnamese Americans
- Filipino Americans
- Hmong Americans
- Laotian Americans
- Dark-skinned Latinos
- Blacks
- New West Indian and African immigrants
- Reservation-bound Native Americans

Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans, and most Middle Eastern Americans; and, finally, that the collective black group will include blacks, dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos, and Laotians.

As a triracial system (or Latin- or Caribbean-like racial order), race conflict will be buffered by the intermediate group, much like class conflict is when the class structure includes a large middle class. Furthermore, color gradations, which have always been important matters of within-group differentiation, will become more salient factors of stratification. Lastly, Americans, like people in complex racial stratification orders, will begin making nationalists appeals (“We are all Americans”), decry their racial past, and claim they are “beyond race.”

This new order, I argue, will be apparently more pluralistic and exhibit more racial fluidity than the order it is replacing. However, this new system will serve as a formidable fortress for white supremacy. Its “we are beyond race” lyrics and color-blind music will drown the voices of those fighting for racial equality (“Why continue talking about race and racism when we are all Americans?”) and may even eclipse the space for talking about race altogether. Hence, in this emerging Latin America-like America, racial inequality will remain—and may even increase—yet there will be a restricted space to fight it.

I must state a few important caveats before I proceed any further. First, figure 9.1 is heuristic rather than definitive and thus is included here just as a guide of how I think the various ethnic groups will line up in the emerging racial order. I acknowledge, however, that the position of some groups may change (e.g., Chinese Americans, Asian Indians, and, particularly, Arab Americans—on this, please see my comments at the end of the chapter), that the map is not inclusive of all the groups in the United States (for instance, Samoans, Micronesians, and Eskimos, among others, are not in the map), that it is *possible* that more than three racial strata emerge, and that at this early stage of this project and given some serious data limitations, some groups may end up in a different racial strata altogether (for example, Filipinos may become “honorary whites” rather than another group in the “collective black” strata). More significantly, if my Latin Americanization thesis is accurate, there will be categorical porosity as well as “pigmentocracy” making the map useful for group- rather than individual-level predictions. The former refers to individual members of a racial strata moving up (or down) the stratification system (e.g., a light-skin middle-class black person marrying a white woman and moving to the “honorary white” strata) and the latter refers to the rank ordering of groups and members of groups according to phenotype and cultural characteristics (e.g., Filipinos being at the top of the “collective black” given their high level of education and income as well as high rate of inter-

racial marriage with whites). Lastly, since I am predicting the future, I truly hope that we can prevent the crystallization of this racial order altogether or at least derail it partially.

In this chapter I proceed as follows. First, since I am suggesting the United States is becoming Latin America–like, I enumerate succinctly a few of the major features of racial stratification in Latin America. Second, I explain why I contend a triracial system is emerging. Third, I examine a few available objective (e.g., data on income and education), subjective (e.g., racial attitudes and racial self-classification), and social interaction indicators (intermarriage and residential choices) to see if they fit the expectations of my Latin Americanization thesis. Lastly, I discuss the implications of this new order for the racial politics of the future.

How Racial Stratification Works in the Americas

Despite claims of nonracialism (“We don’t have racism here. That is an American problem.”), racial minorities in Latin American countries tend to be worse off, comparatively speaking, than racial minorities in Western nations. Yet, few revolts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Latin America have had a clear racial component (important exceptions such as the Zapatista movement notwithstanding). This apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that race has very limited “discursive space” in Latin America and, in order for people to struggle along an axis of social division, that axis must be visible and real to them. “Prejudice”—Latin Americans do not talk about “racism”—is regarded as a legacy from slavery and colonialism and “racial” inequality (again, Latin Americans and Caribbeans do not believe race is part of their social reality) is regarded as the product of class dynamics.

Since examining the long history that produced this state of affairs is beyond the scope of this chapter, I just sketch¹⁵ six central features of Latin American (and Caribbean) racial stratification.

1. Miscegenation or “Mestizaje”

Latin American nation-states, with a few exceptions, are thoroughly racially mixed. Racial mixing, however, in no way challenged white supremacy in colonial or postcolonial Latin America since (1) the mixing was between white men and Indian or black women, maintaining the race/gender order in place; (2) the men were fundamentally poor and/or working class, which helped maintain the race/class order in place; (3) the mixing followed a racially hierarchical pattern with “whitening” as a goal; and (4) marriages among people

in the three main racial groups were (and still are) mostly homogamous (among people from the same racial strata).

2. Plural Racial Stratification Systems

Although Portuguese and Spanish colonial states wanted to create “two societies,” the demographic realities of colonial life superseded their wishes. Because most colonial outposts attracted very few Europeans, these societies developed intermediate groups of “browns,” “pardos,” or “mestizos” that buffered sociopolitical conflicts. Even though these groups did not achieve the status of “white” anywhere, they nonetheless had a better status than the Indian or black masses and, therefore, developed their own distinct interest.

3. Colorism or Pigmentocracy

There is yet another layer of complexity in Latin American racial stratification systems. The plural racial strata are also internally stratified by “color” (in quotation marks because in addition to skin tone, phenotype, hair texture, eye color, culture and education, and class matter in the racial classification of individuals in Latin America), a phenomenon known in the literature as pigmentocracy or colorism.

4. “Blanqueamiento”: Whitening as Ideology and Practice

“Blanqueamiento” (whitening) has been treated in the Latin American literature as an ideology. However, *blanqueamiento* was and is a real economic, political, and personal process. At the personal level, families can be colored or even racially divided and exhibit differential treatment toward dark-skinned members. Thus, rather than showing Latin American racial flexibility, racial mixing oriented by the goal of whitening shows the effectiveness of the logic of white supremacy.

5. National Ideology of “Mestizaje”

National independence in Latin America meant, among other things, silencing any discussion about race and forging the myth of national unity. After years of attempting to unite Latin American nations under the banner of *Hispanidad*, a more formidable ideology crystallized: the ideology of *mestizaje* (racial mixing). Although Latin American writers and politicians have praised the virtues of *mestizaje*, this notion has worked as an ideology to help keep race below the social radar and better safeguard white power.

6. “We Are All ‘Latinoamericanos’”: Race as Nationality/Culture

Most Latin Americans refuse to identify themselves in racial terms. Instead, they prefer to use national (or cultural) descriptors such as “I am Puerto Rican or Brazilian.” This behavior is cited as an example of the fluidity of race in Latin America. However, defining the nation and the “people” as the “fusion of cultures” (even though the fusion is viewed in a Eurocentric manner), is the logical outcome of all of the factors mentioned above. Nationalist statements such as “We are all Puerto Ricans” are not evidence of nonracialism, but the direct manifestation of the racial stratification peculiar to Latin America.

Why Latin Americanization Now?

What are the reasons behind racial stratification becoming Latin America-like at this point in our history? The reasons, in my estimation, are multiple. First, as I discussed above, the demography of the nation is changing. Racial minorities are now about 30 percent of the population and, as population projections suggest, may become the numeric majority by the year 2050. This rapid darkening of America is creating a situation similar to that of Puerto Rico, Cuba, or Venezuela in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In both historical periods, the elites realized their countries were becoming majority “black” (or “nonwhite”) and devised a number of strategies (unsuccessful in the former and successful in the latter) to whiten their population.¹⁶ Although whitening the population through immigration or by classifying many newcomers as white is a possible solution to the new American demography, for reasons discussed below, I do not think this is likely.¹⁷ Hence, a more plausible accommodation to the new racial reality is to (1) create an intermediate racial group to buffer racial conflict,¹⁸ (2) allow some newcomers into the white racial strata, and (3) incorporate most immigrants into the collective black strata.

Second, as part of the tremendous reorganization that transpired in America in the post-civil rights era, a new kinder and gentler white supremacy emerged, which I labeled elsewhere as the “new racism” (for a quick summary of my argument, see chapter 1 in this book or chapter 4 in my 2001 book *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*). In post-civil rights America the maintenance of systemic white privilege is accomplished socially, economically, and politically through institutional, covert, and apparently nonracial practices. Whether in banks or universities, in stores or housing markets, smiling discrimination tends to be the order of the day. This “softer” kind of discrimination is in line with the way discrimination operates in Latin

America and will ease the transition to a discourse of “racism is declining in significance here.”

This new white supremacy has also produced an accompanying ideology that rings Latin America all over: the ideology of color-blind racism. This ideology, as it is the norm all over Latin America, denies the salience of race, scorns those who talk about race, and increasingly proclaims that “We are all Americans.” (This is the main subject of this book and thus needs little discussion here.)

Third, race relations have become globalized. The once almost all-white Western nations have now “interiorized the other.”¹⁹ The new world systemic need for capital accumulation has led to the incorporation of “dark” foreigners as “guest workers” and even as permanent workers. Thus today European nations have racial minorities in their midst who are progressively becoming an underclass,²⁰ have developed an internal “racial structure” (see chapter 1) to maintain white power, and have a curious racial ideology that combines ethnonationalism with a race-blind ideology similar to the color-blind racism of the United States today.²¹

This new global racial reality, I believe, will reinforce the Latin Americanization trend in the United States as versions of color-blind racism will become prevalent in most Western nations. Furthermore, as many formerly almost-all-white Western countries (e.g., Germany, France, England, etc.) become more and more diverse, the Latin American model of racial stratification may surface in these societies too.

Fourth, the convergence of the political and ideological actions of the Republican Party, conservative commentators and activists, and the so-called multiracial movement has created the space for the radical transformation of the way we gather racial data in America. One possible outcome of the Census Bureau categorical back-and-forth on racial and ethnic classifications is either the dilution of racial data or the elimination of race as an official category. At this point, Ward Connerly and his cronies lost the first round in their California Racial Privacy, but I believe they may be successful in other states and, given the changes in the Supreme Court, their efforts may bear fruit in the near future.

If race disappears as a category of official division, as it has in most of the world, this will facilitate the emergence of a plural racial order where the groups exist in *practice* but are not officially recognized—and anyone trying to address racial divisions is likely to be chided for racializing the population. This is, as I have argued elsewhere, the secret of race in Latin America.²²

Lastly, the attack on affirmative action, which is part of what Stephen Steinberg (1995) has labeled as the “racial retreat,”²³ is the clarion call signaling the end of race-based social policy in the United States. The recent Supreme

Court *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision, hailed by some observers as a victory, is at best a weak victory because it allows for a “narrowly tailored” employment of race in college admissions, imposes an artificial twenty-five-year deadline for the program, and encourages a monumental case-by-case analysis for admitting students that is likely to create chaos and push institutions into making admissions decisions based on test scores. Again, this trend reinforces the trend toward Latin Americanization because the elimination of race-based social policy is, among other things, predicated on the notion that race no longer affects the life chances of Americans. Nevertheless, as in Latin America, we may eliminate race by decree and maintain—or even see an increase in—the degree of racial inequality.

A Look at the Data

To recapitulate, I contend that because of a number of important demographic, sociopolitical, and international changes, the United States is developing a more complex system of racial stratification that resembles those typical of Latin American societies. I suggest three racial strata will develop, namely, whites, honorary whites, and the collective black and that “phenotype” will be a central factor determining where groups and members of racial and ethnic groups will fit—lighter people at the top, medium in the middle, and dark at the bottom.²⁴ Although I posit that Latin Americanization will not fully materialize for several more decades, in the following sections I provide a cursory analysis of various objective, subjective, and social interaction indicators to see if the trends support my thesis.

A. Objective Standing of “Whites,” “Honorary Whites,” and “Blacks”

If Latin Americanization is happening in the United States, gaps in income, poverty rates, education, and occupational standing between whites, honorary whites, and the collective black should be developing. The available data suggests this is the case. In terms of income, as table 9.1 shows, “white” Latinos (Argentines, Chileans, Costa Ricans, and Cubans) are doing much better than dark-skinned Latinos (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, etc.). The apparent exceptions in table 9.1 (Bolivians and Panamanians) are examples of self-selection among these immigrant groups. For example, four of the largest ten concentrations of Bolivians in the United States are in Virginia, a state with just 7.2 percent Latinos (Census Bureau 2000).²⁵

Table 9.1 also shows that Asians exhibit a pattern similar to that of Latinos. Hence, a severe income gap is emerging between groups I label as honorary

TABLE 9.1
Mean Per Capita Income (\$) of Selected Asian and Latino Ethnic Groups, 2000

<i>Latinos</i>	<i>Mean Income</i>	<i>Asian Americans</i>	<i>Mean Income</i>
Mexicans	9,467.30	Chinese	20,728.54
Puerto Ricans	11,314.95	Japanese	23,786.13
Cubans	16,741.89	Koreans	16,976.19
Guatemalans	11,178.60	Asian Indians	25,682.15
Salvadorans	11,371.92	Filipinos	19,051.53
Costa Ricans	14,226.92	Taiwanese	22,998.05
Panamanians	16,181.20	Hmong	5,175.34
Argentines	23,589.99	Vietnamese	14,306.74
Chileans	18,272.04	Cambodians	8,680.48
Bolivians	16,322.53	Laotians	10,375.57
Whites	17,968.87	Blacks	11,366.74

Note: I use per capita income because family income distorts the status of some groups as some groups have more individuals contributing toward the family income than other groups (e.g., the case of most Asian families).

Source: 2000 PUMS 5% Sample.

white Asians (Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Chinese) and those I suggest belong to the collective black (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotians).

The analysis of data on education, occupations, and unemployment reveals similar patterns (for tables on these matters, see the chapter referred to in footnote 15). That is, light-skinned Latinos and elite Asians do significantly better than their darker brethren in all these areas.

B. Subjective Standing of Racial Strata

Social psychologists have amply demonstrated that it takes very little for groups to form, develop a common view, and adjudicate status positions to nominal characteristics.²⁶ Thus, it should not be surprising if gaps in income, occupational status, education, and employment among these various strata are leading to early stages of group formation. For example, members of the groups I label as likely to become honorary white may be classifying themselves as “white” and believing they are different (better) than those I argue likely to comprise the collective black category. If this is happening, members of these groups should also be in the process of developing white-like racial attitudes befitting of their new social position and differentiating (distancing) themselves from the members of the group I believe will comprise the collective black.

In line with my thesis, I expect whites to be making distinctions between honorary whites and the collective black, specifically, exhibiting a more posi-

tive outlook toward honorary whites than toward members of the collective black. Finally, if Latin Americanization is happening, I speculate that members of the collective black should exhibit a diffused and contradictory racial consciousness as blacks and Indians do throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁷ I examine some of these matters in the following subsections.

Social Identity of Honorary Whites

1. Self-Reports on Race: The Case of Latinos

Historically, most Latinos have classified themselves as “white” but the proportion of Latinos who self-classify as such varies tremendously by group. Hence, as table 9.2 shows, whereas 60 percent or more of the members of the Latino groups I regard as honorary white self-classify as white, 50 percent or fewer of the members of the groups I regard as belonging to the collective black do so. As a case in point, whereas Mexicans, Dominicans, and Central Americans are very likely to report “Other” as their preferred “racial” classification, most Costa Ricans, Cubans, Chileans, and Argentines choose the “white” descriptor.²⁸ Hence, the data in this table seems to fit my thesis.

2. “Racial” Distinctions among Asians

Although for political matters, Asians tend to vote panethnically,²⁹ distinctions between native-born and foreign-born (e.g., American-born Chinese

TABLE 9.2
Racial Self-Classification by Selected Latin America–Origin Latino Ethnic Groups, 2000

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Native American</i>	<i>Asian</i>
Dominicans	28.21	10.93	59.21	1.07	0.57
Salvadorans	41.01	0.82	56.95	0.81	0.41
Guatemalans	42.95	1.24	53.43	2.09	0.28
Hondurans	48.51	6.56	43.41	1.24	0.29
Mexicans	50.47	0.92	46.73	1.42	0.45
Puerto Ricans	52.42	7.32	38.85	0.64	0.77
Costa Ricans	64.83	5.91	28.18	0.56	0.53
Bolivians	65.52	0.32	32.79	1.32	0.05
Colombians	69.01	1.53	28.54	0.49	0.44
Venezuelans	75.89	2.58	20.56	0.36	0.60
Chileans	77.04	0.68	21.27	0.44	0.56
Cubans	88.26	4.02	7.26	0.17	0.29
Argentines	88.70	0.33	10.54	0.08	0.35

Source: 2000 PUMS 5% Sample.

and foreign-born Chinese) and between economically successful and unsuccessful Asians are developing. In fact, according to various analysts, given the tremendous diversity of experiences among Asian Americans “all talk of Asian panethnicity should now be abandoned as useless speculation.”³⁰ Leland Saito (1998), in his *Race and Politics*, points out that many Asians have reacted to the “Asian flack” they are experiencing with the rise in Asian immigration by fleeing the cities of immigration, disidentifying from new Asians, and invoking the image of the “good immigrant.” In some communities, this has led to older, assimilated segments of a community to dissociate from recent migrants. For example, a Nisei returning to his community after years of overseas military service told his dad the following about the city’s new demography: “Goddamn dad, where the hell did all these Chinese come from? Shit, this isn’t even our town anymore.”³¹

To be clear, my point is not that Asian Americans have not engaged in coalition politics and, in various locations, participated in concerted efforts to elect Asian American candidates. My point instead is that the group labeled “Asian Americans” is profoundly divided along many axes and thus I forecast that many of those already existing divisions will be racialized by whites (e.g., sexploitation of Asian women by lonely white men in the “Oriental bride” market) as well as by Asian Americans themselves (e.g., intra-Asian preferences seem to follow a racialized hierarchy of desire).³²

Racial Attitudes of Various Racial Strata

1. Latinos’ Racial Attitudes

Although researchers have shown that Latinos tend to hold negative views of blacks and positive views of whites,³³ the picture is more complex. Immigrant Latinos tend to have more negative views about blacks than native-born Latinos. For instance, a study of Latinos in Houston, Texas, found that 38 percent of native-born Latinos compared to 47 percent of foreign-born held negative stereotypes of blacks. This may explain why 63 percent of native-born Latinos versus 34 percent of foreign-born report frequent contact with blacks.³⁴

But the incorporation of the majority of Latinos as “colonial subjects” (Puerto Ricans), refugees from wars (Central Americans), or illegal migrant workers (Mexicans) has foreshadowed subsequent patterns of integration into the racial order. In a similar vein, the incorporation of a minority of Latinos as “political refugees” (Cubans, Chileans, and Argentines) or as “neutral” immigrants trying to better their economic situation (Costa Rica, Colombia) has allowed them a more comfortable ride in America’s racial boat. Therefore,

whereas the incorporation of most Latinos in the United States has meant becoming “nonwhite,” for a few it has meant becoming almost white.

Nevertheless, given that most Latinos experience discrimination in labor and housing markets as well as in schools, they quickly realize their “non-white” status. This leads them, as Nilda Flores-Gonzales (1999) and Suzanne Oboler (1995) have shown, to adopt a plurality of identities that signify “otherness.”³⁵ Thus, dark-skinned Latinos are even calling themselves “black” or “Afro-Dominicans” or “Afro-Puerto Rican.”³⁶ For example, José Ali, a Latino interviewed by Clara Rodriguez (2000) in her book *Changing Race*, stated, “By inheritance I am Hispanic. However, I identify more with blacks because to white America, if you are my color, you are a nigger. I can’t change my color, and I do not wish to do so.”

When asked, “Why do you see yourself as black?” he said, “Because when I was jumped by whites, I was not called ‘spic,’ but I was called a ‘nigger.’”³⁷

The identification of most Latinos as “racial others” has led them to be more likely to be pro-black than pro-white. For example, data on Latinos’ racial affects toward various groups indicates that the proportion of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who feel very warm toward blacks is much higher (about 12 percentage points for Mexicans and 14 percentage points for Puerto Ricans) than toward Asians (the readings in the “thermometer” range from 0 to 100 and the higher the “temperature” is, the more positive are the feelings toward the group in question). In contrast, the proportion of Cubans who feel very warm toward blacks is 10 to 14 percentage points *lower* than Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Cubans are also more likely to feel very warm toward Asians than toward blacks. More fitting of my thesis, analysis of the same data in table 9.3 shows that Latinos who identify as “white” express similar empathy toward blacks and Asians, those who identify as “black” express the most positive af-

TABLE 9.3
Proportion of Latinos Who Express High Affect
toward Blacks and Asians

<i>Degrees-of-Feeling Thermometer</i>	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Asians</i>
Mexicans		
51–74	11.9	11.8
75–100	34.3	22.2
Puerto Ricans		
51–74	11.8	9.0
75–100	39.5	25.3
Cubans		
51–74	14.5	9.9
75–100	25.1	29.9

Source: Forman, Martinez, and Bonilla-Silva, “Latinos’ Perceptions of Blacks and Asians: Testing the Immigrant Hypothesis” (unpublished manuscript).

fect toward blacks—about 20 degrees warmer toward black than toward Asians (data now shown here). Again, this finding is fitting of my thesis.

2. Asians' Racial Attitudes

Various studies have documented that Asians tend to hold antiblack and anti-Latino attitudes. For instance, a study found that Chinese residents of Los Angeles expressed negative racial attitudes toward blacks.³⁸ One Chinese resident stated, "Blacks in general seem to be overly lazy" and another asserted, "Blacks have a definite attitude problem."³⁹ Studies on Korean shopkeepers in various locales have found that over 70 percent of them hold antiblack attitudes.⁴⁰

These general findings are confirmed in table 9.4. This table has data on the degree (in a scale running from 1 to 7) to which various racial groups subscribe to stereotypes about the intelligence and welfare dependency of other groups. The table clearly shows that Asians (in this study, Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese) are more likely than even whites to hold antiblack and anti-Latino views (for example, whereas whites score 3.79 and 3.96 for blacks and Latinos, Asians score 4.39 and 4.46). In line with this finding, they hold, comparatively speaking, more positive views about whites than Latinos and blacks.⁴¹ Thus, as in many Latin American and Caribbean societies, members of the intermediate racial strata buffer racial matters by holding more pro-white attitudes than whites themselves.

TABLE 9.4
Relationship between Race/Ethnicity and Racial Stereotypes
on Intelligence and Welfare Dependency of Blacks, Latinos, Asians,
and Whites in Los Angeles, 1993–1994

<i>Group Stereotyping</i>	<i>Group Stereotyped</i>			
	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Latinos</i>	<i>Asians</i>	<i>Whites</i>
Unintelligent?				
White	3.79	3.96	2.90	3.09
Asians	4.39	4.46	2.90	3.25
Latinos	3.93	3.57	2.74	2.87
Blacks	3.31	3.96	3.21	3.32
F-ratio	***	***	***	***
Prefer Welfare?				
White	4.22	4.08	2.30	2.48
Asians	5.10	5.08	2.52	2.93
Latinos	5.57	4.49	2.77	2.77
Blacks	4.12	4.29	2.67	2.77
F-ratio	***	***	***	***

Source: Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality, 1993–1994.

3. The Collective Black and Whites' Racial Attitudes

After a protracted conflict over the meaning of whites' racial attitudes (for a discussion, see Bonilla-Silva and Lewis 1999), survey researchers seem to have reached an agreement: "a hierarchical racial order continues to shape all aspects of American life" (Dawson 2000, 344). Whites express/defend their social position on issues such as affirmative action and reparations, school integration and busing, neighborhood integration, welfare reform, and even the death penalty (see Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000; Tuch and Martin 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2001). Regarding how whites think about Latinos and Asians, not many researchers have separated the groups that comprise "Latinos" and "Asians" to assess if whites are making distinctions amongst them. However, the available evidence suggests whites regard Asians highly and are significantly less likely to hold Latinos in high regard.⁴² Thus, when judged on a host of racial stereotypes, whites rate themselves and Asians almost identically (favorable stereotype rating) and rate negatively (at an almost equal level) both blacks and Latinos.

Bobo and Johnson also show that Latinos tend to rate blacks negatively and that blacks tend to do the same regarding Latinos. They also find that Latinos, irrespective of national ancestry, self-rate lower than whites and Asians (blacks, however, self-rate at the same level with whites and as better than Asians). This pattern seems to confirm Latin Americanization as those at the bottom in Latin America tend to exhibit a diffused rather than clear racial consciousness. My contention seems to be also bolstered by their findings that "blacks give themselves ratings that tilt in an unfavorable dimension on the traits of welfare dependency and involvement with gangs" and that "for Latinos three of the dimensions tilt in the direction of negative in-group ratings."⁴³

Social Interaction among Members of the Three Racial Strata

If Latin Americanization is happening, one would expect more social (e.g., friendship, associations as neighbors, etc.) and intimate (e.g., marriage) contact between whites and members of the groups I label honorary white than between whites (and honorary whites) and members of the collective black. A cursory analysis of the available data suggests this is in fact the case.

1. Interracial Marriage

Although most marriages in America are still intraracial, the rates vary substantially by group. Whereas 93 percent of whites and blacks marry within-group, 70 percent of Latinos and Asians do so, and only 33 percent

Native Americans marry Native Americans.⁴⁴ More significantly, when one disentangles the generic terms “Asians” and “Latinos,” the data fit even more closely the Latin Americanization thesis. For example, among Latinos, Cuban, Mexican, Central American, and South Americans have higher rates of outmarriage than Puerto Ricans and Dominicans.⁴⁵ Although interpreting the Asian American outmarriage patterns is very complex (groups such as Filipinos and Vietnamese have higher than expected rates in part due to the Vietnam War and the military bases in the Philippines), it is worth pointing out that the highest rate belongs to Japanese Americans and Chinese and the lowest to Southeast Asians, a pattern that seems to fit the contours of my Latin Americanization argument.⁴⁶

Furthermore, racial assimilation through marriage (“whitening”) is significantly more likely for the children of Asian-white and Latino-white unions than for those of black-white unions, a fact that bolsters my Latin Americanization thesis. Hence, whereas only 22 percent of the children of black fathers and white mothers are classified as white, the children of similar unions among Asians are twice as likely to be classified as white.⁴⁷ For Latinos, the data fit even closer my thesis as Latinos of Cuban, Mexican, and South American origin have high rates of exogamy compared to Puerto Ricans and Dominicans.⁴⁸ We concur with Moran’s (2001)⁴⁹ speculation that this may reflect the fact that because Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have far more dark-skinned members, they have restricted chances for outmarriage to whites in a highly racialized marriage market.

2. Residential Segregation among Racial Strata

An imperfect measure of interracial interaction is the level of neighborhood “integration.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the various indices devised by demographers to assess the level of residential segregation allow us to gauge in broad strokes the level of interracial contact in various cities. In this section, I focus on the segregation of Latinos and Asians as the high segregation experienced by blacks is very well known.⁵¹

Residential Segregation among Latinos

Researchers have shown that Latinos are less segregated from and are more exposed to whites than blacks.⁵² Yet, they have also documented that dark-skinned Latinos experience black-like rates of residential segregation from whites. Early research on Latino immigrant settlement patterns in Chicago, for example, showed that Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were relegated to spaces largely occu-

pied by blacks, in part because of skin color discrimination.⁵³ More recent studies find also this race effect on Latino residential segregation patterns. Latinos who identify as white, primarily Cubans and South Americans, are considerably more likely to reside in areas with non-Latino whites than are Latinos who identify as black, mainly Dominicans and Puerto Ricans.⁵⁴

Residential Segregation among Asians

Of all minority groups, Asian Americans are the least segregated from whites. However, they have experienced an increase in residential segregation in recent years.⁵⁵ In a recent review Zubrinsky Charles (2003) found that from 1980 to 2000, the index of dissimilarity for Asians had increased three points (from thirty-seven to forty) while the index of exposure to whites had declined sixteen points (from eighty-eight to sixty-two).⁵⁶ Part of the increase in segregation (and the concomitant decrease in exposure) may be the result of the arrival of newer and poorer immigrants from Southeast Asia.⁵⁷ For example, the Vietnamese—a group I predict will be part of the collective black—almost doubled its size between 1990 and 2000. While the majority of residential segregation studies are based on black, Latino, and Asian proximity to whites, which limits an examination of intragroup differences among Asians and Latinos, the fact that Asians have much lower dissimilarity indexes and higher exposure indexes vis-à-vis Latinos and blacks, fits my overall claim that the majority of Asians will belong to the honorary white category.

Discussion

I have presented a broad and bold thesis about the future of racial stratification in the United States.⁵⁸ However, at this early stage of the analysis and given the serious limitations of the data on “Latinos” and “Asians” (most of the data is not parceled out by subgroups and hardly anything is provided by skin tone), it is hard to make a conclusive case. I acknowledge that factors such as nativity or socioeconomic characteristics may explain some of the patterns I documented.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that almost all the objective, subjective, and social interaction indicators I reviewed were in the direction I predicted supports my Latin Americanization thesis. For example, the objective data clearly show substantive gaps between the groups I labeled “white,” “honorary whites,” and the “collective black.” In terms of income and education, whites tend to be slightly better off than honorary whites who tend to be significantly better off than the collective black. Not surprisingly, a variety of subjective

indicators signal the emergence of *internal* stratification among racial minorities. For example, whereas some Latinos (e.g., Cubans, Argentines, Chileans, etc.) are very likely to self-classify as whites, others are not (e.g., Dominicans and Puerto Ricans living in the United States). This has led them to develop a racial attitudinal profile, at least in terms of subscription to stereotypical views about groups, similar to that of whites. Finally, the objective and subjective indicators had a correlate at the level of social interaction. Data on interracial marriage and residential segregation shows that whites are significantly more likely to live nearby honorary whites and to intermarry them than members of the collective black.

I also acknowledge that my racial map and arguments can be debated and, since I have already heard some critiques, I wish to take the opportunity to defend my case. The three criticisms of my work I hear most often are the following: (1) Why do I classify Arab Americans as “honorary white” at a time when all Arabs, and folks who look like them, are being labeled terrorists? (2) How can I predict that color blindness will become even more salient when there seems to be a resurgence of old-fashioned racism? (3) Why do I suggest a tri-racial order will emerge when many Latinos and whites fight to become white?

The first person with whom I debated some of these points was my wife, who happens to be a Palestinian woman. And I will state here exactly what I told her in the privacy of our home. Regarding the first point, I used a semantic move and told her “I love you baby, but . . .” and proceeded to explain to her that this map is heuristic and, thus, that it is not definitive. Groups may move up or down and I am willing to contemplate this possibility *if the data warrant it*. However, because the data in this chapter—and in forthcoming work—do not show that Arab Americans or Asian Indians (a group that is, for many reasons, in a similar location in whites’ imaginary to Arab Americans) have changed their racial politics, I am not inclined to move them to the “collective black” category. In fact, I suggest their historical position is analogous to that of Japanese Americans during World War II. (In their case, the record shows that despite suffering from the horrible ignominy of internment, Japanese Americans returned rather quickly to an in-between status in the racial order and as the favored minorities for whites. Furthermore, they did not shift their political lenses and join in the struggle with other minorities in the sixties and seventies. In contrast to Latinos, blacks, and Native Americans, Japanese Americans hardly participated in the civil rights movement.) Thus, Arab Americans may be suffering from a sort of collective punishment from whites by being regarded as terrorists, as fundamentalist, as uncivilized or differently civilized, but I do not see systematic evidence suggesting they are developing an oppositional identity such as that exhibited by other minorities. But, as I also told my wife, if I see data suggesting that “Arab Americans”⁶⁰ are in fact

becoming members of the “collective black” and behaving as such in terms of their patterns of interaction, I am willing to revise my map.

Regarding the second point, I still maintain that color blindness will become the glue that will bind the triracial order. This does not mean that Jim Crow racism is totally dead or that it may not temporarily gain space—making Amerika feel more like Amerikkka. However, we must understand that because color blindness is about maintaining white power, this ideology, as all ideologies, can bend in many ways to help in this task. Even the material I included in the main text of the book showed that it is possible for whites to claim they are color blind and still talk about race in crude ways. Examples of this phenomenon abound. For instance, every night you can watch Lou Dobbs on CNN attack so-called illegal aliens, talk about China and India as if they were the real economic threat for America, trash Arab nations, and make fun of so-called political correctness in a color-blind way. And “in point of fact,” to use one of Lou Dobbs’s favorite verbal mannerisms, whenever anyone calls him “racist” or claims he is “being racist,” he gets indignant and claims to be above the racial fray. Similarly, the way President Bush and his cabinet have attempted to thread the needle in this “War on Terror” fits the logic of color blindness. Their rhetorical plan seems to be, “Say a lot about the ‘enemy,’ but use disclaimers so that you can never be pinned down as intolerant or racist.”

Lastly, on the matter of whether Asians and Latinos will join the ranks of whites, I simply state almost verbatim what I stated in a debate on this matter in an edited book with my colleague George Yancey, author of *Who Is White? Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide*.⁶¹ Although Yancey’s claim is meritorious—he claims that because most Asians and Latinos self-identify as white in the Census, they should therefore be considered as such—and I have many coincidences with him (I too argue that many Latinos and Asians will become white), I believe his overall claim is unlikely. There are four reasons why I think his general prediction is unlikely. First, Latinos and Asians are not “new immigrants.” They have been in the United States since at least the nineteenth century. Therefore, if they were going to become white, that process should have started in the 1830s (for Mexican Americans) and 1840s for (Chinese Americans). The fact that this has not happened in mass (I acknowledge that some Asians and Latinos, like light-skinned blacks in the past, became white through passing) suggests that the racialization of these groups is different from that of people of European descent.

Second, all racial categories are historico-political constructions and, therefore, always exhibit malleability and porosity. However, the incorporation of groups into the U.S. white category has shown, so far, to have some epidermic boundaries, that is, groups and individuals added to the category have been European-looking. Hence, *groups* lacking epidermic capital, such as Latinos and Asians, will have more trouble getting admission into whiteness (but I point out

that individual members of these groups can use their individual racial capital, such as light skin color, eye color, etc., to move up the racial ladder).

Third, the kind of assimilation process experienced by many of the groups that are presumed to become white (e.g., Mexican Americans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, etc.) seems different from that of European immigrants in the early part of the twentieth century. Thus, analysts now talk about “segmented assimilation” to refer to the variety of outcomes of these groups.⁶²

And fourth, the class and cultural distance between the masses of Mexican, Central American, and some Asian immigrants and whites is such that it is unlikely that most of them will be able to become white. The Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican barrios and the Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese towns across the nation are not like the temporary ethnic ghettos of the past. Some of these neighborhoods have more than one hundred years of existence, a very long time to be regarded as “transition neighborhoods.”

I restate for the record that I acknowledge that many of these new immigrants as well as many of the old minority citizens will either become white or near-white (honorary white). My big difference with Yancey and others is that I believe that most of these people will not become white and will accompany blacks in the large loosely organized racial strata at the bottom of the racial order.

Race Struggle in a Latin America-like United States

If my predictions are right, what will the consequences of Latin Americans be for race relations in the United States? First, racial politics will change dramatically. The “us versus them” racial dynamic will lessen as “honorary whites” grow in size and social importance. They are likely to buffer racial conflict—or derail it altogether—as intermediate groups do in many Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Second, the ideology of color-blind racism that I examined in this book is likely to become even more salient in the United States. Color-blind racism is in fact an ideology similar to that prevailing in Latin American and Caribbean societies and like there, it will help glue the emerging racial order and buffer racial conflict.

Third, if the state decides to stop gathering racial statistics, the struggle to document the impact of race in a variety of social venues will become monumental. More significantly, because state actions always impact civil society, if the state decides to erase race from above, the *social* recognition of “races” in the polity may become harder. We may develop a Latin American-like “disgust” for even mentioning anything that is race-related.

Fourth, the deep history of black-white divisions in the United States has been such that the centrality of the black identity will not dissipate. For instance, research on the “black elite” shows that it exhibits racial attitudes in

line with their racial group.⁶³ That identity, as I suggested in this chapter, may be even taken up by dark-skinned Latinos as it is being rapidly taken up by most West Indians. For example, Al, a fifty-three-year-old Jamaican engineer interviewed by Milton Vickerman (1999), stated,

I have nothing against Haitians; I have nothing against black Americans. . . . If you're a nigger, you're a nigger, regardless of whether you are from Timbuktu. . . . There isn't the unity that one would like to see. . . . Blacks have to appreciate blacks, no matter where they are from. Just look at it the way I look at it: That you're the same.⁶⁴

However, I expect some important changes to take place even among the black population. Their racial consciousness, I argue, will become more diffused. For example, blacks will be more likely to accept many stereotypes about themselves (e.g., "We are lazier than whites") and exhibit what I label here as a "blunted oppositional consciousness" (see chapter 8). Furthermore, the external pressure of "multiracials" in white contexts⁶⁵ and the internal pressure of "ethnic" blacks may change the notion of "blackness" and even the position of some "blacks" in the system. Colorism may become an even more important factor as a way of making social distinctions among "blacks."⁶⁶

Fifth, the new racial stratification system will be more effective in maintaining white supremacy. Whites will still be at the top of the social structure but will face fewer race-based challenges. And, to avoid confusion about my claim regarding "honorary whites," let me clarify that I believe their standing and status will be ultimately dependent upon whites' wishes and practices.⁶⁷ "Honorary" means that they will remain secondary, will still face discrimination, and will not receive equal treatment in society. For example, although Arab Americans should be regarded as "honorary whites," their treatment in the post-September 11 era suggests their status as "white" and as "Americans" is tenuous at best. Although some analysts and commentators may welcome Latin Americanization as a positive trend in American race relations,⁶⁸ those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy will soon discover that behind the statement "We are all Americans" hides a deeper, hegemonic way of maintaining white supremacy. As a Latin America-like society,⁶⁹ the United States will become a society with more rather than less racial inequality but with a reduced forum for racial contestation. The apparent blessing of "not seeing race" will become a curse for those struggling for racial justice in years to come. We may become "All Americans," as commercials in recent times suggest, but paraphrasing George Orwell, "some will be more American than others."

In the next chapter of this book, I will tackle the meaning of the election of President Obama. Although many commentators and analysts believe his election signifies "the end of racism" or a monumental change in our long racial history, I will argue that it is in line with color-blind racism.